

February 2, 2007

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BUREAU OF HIGHWAY DESIGN**

CONFERENCE REPORT

PROJECT: HAMPTON FALLS-HAMPTON
13408B
Replacement of I-95 over Taylor River and Investigation of Dam Removal

DATE OF CONFERENCE: November 15, 2006

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: Hampton Falls Town Hall

ATTENDED BY: DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

R. Landry A. Hall

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

D. Loiselle B. Lambert

LOUIS BERGER GROUP

R. Stewart

TOWN OF HAMPTON FALLS

Selectmen.....	F. Ferreira, Jr. S. Volpone T. Tocci
Town Administrator.....	E. Small
Planning Board.....	M. Garavaglia
Fire Department.....	J. Lord
Conservation Commission.....	K. Ayers

SUBJECT: Selectmen's Meeting with the Town of Hampton Falls

NOTES ON CONFERENCE:

The purpose of this meeting was to inform the Selectboard of Hampton Falls about the Taylor River project. R. Landry started off the meeting by introducing the members of the Technical Committee that were present and then gave a brief overview of the project. The dam that creates the Taylor River impoundment was built in 1949, is in need of repair, and does not meet dam

safety standards. In the 1960s a fish ladder was constructed and attached to the dam. The fish ladder is in need of repair and is not attracting fish effectively. The abutments of the bridge that carries Interstate 95 over the Taylor River are beginning to deteriorate and will be in need of repair soon. This project intends to repair or replace the bridge and to investigate repair, relocation, or removal of the dam and fish ladder. To determine the best solution for these problems a feasibility study is being conducted to investigate and develop alternatives, and to identify the best alternative for this situation. The feasibility study will take into account public safety, water quality, flood risk, and fish passage.

Presently the feasibility study is in its early stages and individuals are still gathering information to work with. R. Landry informed the Selectboard that the purpose of this meeting was to find out what issues Hampton Falls and its residents may want to see addressed as part of the proposed project. A summary of the project schedule was then given. The DOT envisions going to a Public Informational meeting in late winter or early spring 2007. Turnpike funding for the project construction is available in 2010.

Selectman Tocci started the question and answer period by asking what has changed about the impoundment and river that requires a feasibility study to be performed in order to address the deficiencies of the bridge and dam. R. Landry responded by noting the declining numbers of river herring in the Taylor River and that there may be benefits to having a free-flowing river or stream. Replacing the bridge gives the State an opportunity to address several issues within the area including retaining the impoundment or letting the area revert back to its natural free-flowing state. The feasibility study is being undertaken to determine the impacts of the different options. An attendee, referencing the fact sheet, stated she was concerned about the degree of actual science that would prove that restoration is the way to go. R. Landry replied that studies have been performed and case studies have shown what happens when dams are removed. A portion of the \$400,000 feasibility study would evaluate the scientific basis of the restoration option. The NH Estuaries Program and the Gulf of Maine Council are funding a portion of the study. It was noted that the consensus has been to keep the pond by most people in the area.

A man said that the town of Hampton was in favor of keeping the pond. He asked if there was any way to improve the water quality. R. Landry replied that water quality issues are part of the investigation. The question was asked if the water quality would come back now that the large-scale farm operation in the area no longer is in operation. R. Landry replied that as he understands it, the phosphorous stays in the water.

J. Lord, fire chief for Hampton Falls, asked if there was a possibility that the dam would stay in some form but that the water level would be lower than it is presently. There is a dry hydrant on Towle Farm Road that is important for the fire protection of the area, which includes both Hampton and Hampton Falls. Hampton has no fire hydrants in the area at all. R. Landry noted the comment. J. Lord also asked for a reiteration of the condition of the bridge. The steel in the saltwater environment is deteriorating. Holes are beginning to develop at the water line in the steel sheeting that form the abutment.

J. Lord asked for consideration of a turnaround between the barrels of the highway when the project is constructed. The area has lately seemed to attract accidents. Currently the emergency vehicles have to go to Seabrook to turn around to travel northbound. He also mentioned that in

times of extreme high water there is 6 inches of water over Towle Farm Road in its low spot and that the Towle Farm Road bridge only has 6 inches of clearance.

Selectman Volpone asked if the velocity of the flow was related to the ecology of the water. R. Landry replied that it was. Selectman Volpone asked if removing the dam would create habitat for other invasive plants such as phragmites. Will solving one problem create another? Selectman Tocci asked if the water level would be low enough without the dam such that the river could dry up in a dry summer. R. Landry replied that there would definitely be a tidal influence to some point up the river from the dam. Selectman Volpone commented that fish would have a hard time if there were no water. It was expressed by R. Landry and D. Loiselle that these are all issues that the feasibility study will be looking at.

A resident of the town whose property abuts the impoundment stated emphatically that the impoundment supported all kinds of wildlife and that he did not see how removing the impoundment could be beneficial. He asked if there were photos of the area prior to the impoundment and about the effect that removing the impoundment would have on property values. R. Landry replied that there were studies on the economic effects of removing dams available from other areas and that it is not always the case that property values go down. He further noted that there is historical aerial photography available, but he did not bring it this evening. These photographs will be available at future public meetings.

E. Volpone noted that it could be inferred from the list of project partners that restoring rivers must be an environmentally acceptable solution. As private citizens however, the people living along the impoundment have different concerns. Is there some way to balance all of this? R. Landry stated that restoration of the river is not the only option that is on the table. The group is looking at other options including a new dam with a more efficient fish ladder.

A resident asked J. Lord if he was concerned about putting salt water into his fire trucks if the river were to become tidal. He responded that his main concern was where the water level would end up. The trucks can be flushed if necessary. Selectman Volpone asked if there was an increase in the technology of fish ladders such that a better one could be constructed than exists. R. Landry replied that there were many types of fish ladders, and that the current one at the dam was added many years after the dam was constructed. D. Loiselle noted that there are a variety of fish passage devices available, however, the type is dependent on the fish species in the area. She further noted that Cheri Patterson, who represents the Fish and Game Department on this project, could provide a better answer to this question, but unfortunately was not available this evening.

Selectman Volpone asked if a logical compromise would be to keep the impoundment and construct a better fish ladder. R. Landry replied that this is one possibility that is being evaluated. Selectman Volpone asked if dredging would be a possibility to remove debris exposed at lower water levels. R. Landry replied that it would probably not be.

D. Loiselle stated that it was good to be getting these comments now so the concerns being voiced could be noted and addressed. She commented that the upcoming Public Informational meeting this spring would be a critical meeting for people to attend to voice their concerns and hear what the feasibility study had found. She also noted that there would be a variety of state and federal representatives available with specialized expertise to answer specific questions. In

addition, she also clarified the role of the DES Dam Bureau - Dam Removal and River Restoration Program in this project. She noted that she is the current River Restoration Coordinator and that she assists dam owners, the DOT in this case, with available options for their dams, which include dam removal and fish passage as alternatives. She works closely with the NHDES Dam Safety Engineers. R. Landry stated that since the DOT is the owner of this dam, it has a lot of input into the final decision that will be made regarding what happens to the dam.

An attendee asked if lowering the water level would encourage vegetative growth in the water. R. Landry replied that if the dam were removed a lot of the vegetative growth would be flushed out. The attendee asked if the Old Stage Road Bridge might be opened up again. R. Landry replied that not as part of this project.

The resident who had spoken up earlier about the effects of dam removal on the wildlife and property values asked if the bridge was in need of repair right now. R. Landry replied that if it was just a bridge, rather than a dam and fish ladder, that the bridge would be being watched but would probably not become a project for a few more years. The resident then went on to compare the project to the Big Dig. He stated that no attempts had been made to repair the dam or the fish ladder and that the bridge did not need to be worked on yet. R. Landry cautioned the man that there is no basis for the assumption that the dam will be removed. R. Landry stated that from a construction standpoint, the bridge cannot be replaced where it is now. It does not make sense to repair the dam now, and then five years later, when the bridge needs replacement, rebuild both in another location. Another resident asked if the existing dam and bridge could be replaced in a different location. R. Landry replied that it is a possibility that is being explored.

A man asked if the specifications for the 100-year storm were out of date. It seems that the 100-year storm has been happening with increasing frequency lately. He also asked if this would impact the engineering process. R. Landry stated that the Department and the US Geological Survey were reevaluating the 100-year storm. The tidal influence plus the 100-year storm would mean raising I-95 substantially so the Department needs to think about what condition can be practically built for.

A lady asked if the dam was managed for storms. R. Landry replied that it was not. He also encouraged residents to remove debris they saw before it became a problem. Funding and permits make it hard for the state to remove the debris. At this point, this portion of the meeting was adjourned so that the Selectboard could move on to other matters of business.

Submitted by:
Andy Hall
Preliminary Design

ADH/adh
NOTED BY: D. Loiselle, C. Patterson

cc: J. Moore
C. Waszczuk